

# Organizing Local Cable Call-in Shows

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## OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose for organizing a mock election television or radio program is to get students involved with their community in a real-world, life experience. In the process of developing their own television and/or radio programs, students will:

1. explore the role of the media in informing Americans about domestic and world affairs and foreign policies.<sup>1</sup>
2. identify opportunities to participate in the democratic process.<sup>2</sup>
3. discover the influence of the media on American political life.
4. objectively analyze TV programs, reports, and news.
5. survey the responsibility of the media to accurately represent all sides of the issues/candidates.
6. develop organizational and creative thinking skills.
7. practice time management, research, and prioritization skills.

## METHODS

The following steps will help you and your students successfully organize a local cable call-in-show:

1. Explore the role of citizens in media.
2. Analyze the media's current coverage of the campaign.
3. Plan and organize your cable call-in show.

**B**y law, public access television and radio stations must provide the public with equal opportunity to develop and produce programming for electronic media. This allows under-represented groups access to television and radio production to express their views and opinions to their communities, thereby extending their First Amendment right to free speech."

1. For the new National Standards for Civics and Government suggestions regarding the process by which foreign policy is developed and influencing factors, see the new standards, Section IV.

2. For the new standards recommendations about the opportunities for citizens to participate in political life, see the new standards, Section V.

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## **1. Explore the role of citizens in media.**

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Explore the opportunities that the media provides for individuals to communicate their concerns and positions. Identify opportunities to become involved in the democratic process, such as writing letters to government officials and newspapers. Pose questions such as: How can individuals influence, or have individuals influenced, the government? What is the purpose of petitions and how do they function? What role do protests play in influencing public officials/legislation (e.g., Rosa Parks' role in obtaining equal rights for African Americans)? How did the famous Love Canal community gain the attention of the government? What role did the media play in that incident? How did environmental standards/legislation change as a result?

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## **2. Analyze the media's current coverage of the campaign.**

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Compare opposing viewpoints on current issues and/or a candidate's platform using a notebook, bulletin board of press clippings, political cartoons or videotapes of candidate speeches. Explore issues such as U.S. involvement in Bosnia, recent government struggles to balance the budget or social services reform such as resolving unemployment wages. Pose questions such as: What role does the media play in informing the public of domestic and world affairs and foreign policies? Is it adequate? Does the media represent all sides of the issues? How does the liberal perspective, as given by the media or a candidate, differ from the conservative view? What do members of each camp include or omit in their testimonies? How does one candidate's position differ from another on current political issues? How does one candidate use the media to support or undermine another candidate? How can citizens become better informed? How have recent events, both national and international, affected the political climate? How will they affect policy/legislation? What have recent media stories about current issues included in their news reports?

What have they omitted? Why? What constitutes negative advertising? Should the media be responsible for running equal amounts of positive or negative advertising for each candidate? What information is included or omitted in a particular negative ad? How does the media affect the public through advertising (negative or positive) or by taking a certain position on an issue?

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## **3. Plan and organize your cable call-in show.**

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Organizing a television program is not difficult, but requires preparation and planning:

- ★ Explore your options.
- ★ Determine the content of your show.
- ★ Determine the format of your show.
- ★ Determine your production needs.
- ★ Assemble a production crew.
- ★ Research candidate and campaign issues.
- ★ Contact public officials.
- ★ Produce your show.
- ★ Select a studio audience.
- ★ Consider the budget.
- ★ Develop a viewer/listener guide.
- ★ Publicize your show.
- ★ Involve the community.
- ★ Attend to detail.
- ★ Follow up.

## **A. EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS.**

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When considering the content (and format) of your program, remember that the possibilities are virtually unlimited! Your only restrictions will be determined by the resources available in your school or your school district. Though this lack of structure may seem overwhelming at first, there are many people and resources that can provide you with help and guidance. Be assured that local public television and radio access stations do not expect you to show up knowing exactly what you want to do—people seldom do! Before involving students, you may want to set up an appointment with a program counselor/planner at your local public television or radio station to discuss your ideas (both content and format) for producing a mock election program. These counselors/planners are public access station employees whose most important job responsibility is to help you focus and achieve your production goals. (Phone numbers for public access stations are usually listed in the Yellow Pages under “Television-Cable” and “Radio Stations and Broadcast Companies.”)

To get an appointment, you may have to become a member of the station. Membership is free but might require that you attend a preliminary orientation of the facilities and a brief explanation of public access media. Once you are an official member, you will have access to all the equipment (cameras, lighting, microphones, sound recording) and space (studios, edit rooms) you will need to produce your program.

## **B. DETERMINE THE CONTENT OF YOUR SHOW.**

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Public access allows you to air any type of programming you want as long as it does not include advertising and is not illegal (your local public access station manager can provide you will legal guidelines for television or radio). This covers an unlimited array of programs such as political viewpoint programs, children’s programs, inspirational programs, home cooking programs, and shopping programs.

To maintain some type of control and liability, the producer of a public access program is typically asked to sign an indemnification form that holds the producer (the person who is responsible for organizing the resources necessary to develop a program) liable for program content. The producer also reserves equipment (and cancels the reservations if necessary), schedules studio and edit time and submits the program to be aired. (In most cases, the producer or executive producer will be you—the teacher—as you are the adult taking responsibility for the project.) By signing this indemnification form, you agree that your program does not contain:

- ★ commercial programming or any material that promotes a product or service.
- ★ unlawful use of copyrighted material.
- ★ a lottery or lottery information.
- ★ slanderous material or an unlawful invasion of privacy.
- ★ material that violates state or federal obscenity laws.

## **C. DETERMINE THE FORMAT OF YOUR SHOW.**

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In addition to discussing possible formats with a program planner/counselor, encourage students to watch other public access or call-in shows to observe format, structure, and timing. What were the most positive/negative elements of the show? What issues were covered? What issues were not included that should have been? Was it well organized? How could the show have been improved? How did this show affect your opinions? How do you think it affected others?

Brainstorm, with students, all the potential ideas for your show. Will your show consist of:

- ★ a panel of political candidates, or students role-playing the candidates, debating election issues while viewers/listeners, from the studio audience or over the phone, react to what was said? (Expert guests knowledgeable in the issues or political analysts might provide additional insight.)

- ★ a mock election convention with student representatives from all schools reporting on the results of mock elections around the district or state? (School results could be tallied and projected on a television screen in the convention facility as well as on the television screen of home viewers. Junior high school students might attend to a phone bank while high school students role-play news anchors and commentators.)
- ★ a student-produced segment of a preexisting local access talk show or political viewpoint show?
- ★ a panel of community leaders, community members, local officials, students and/or parents debating candidate proposals to solve community problems?
- ★ a weekly program designed to inform the public about the election, candidates, and issues? (Each week might feature a different guest speaker such as a political science professor, member of a special interest group, spokesperson for a candidate, or political analyst.)
- ★ a short informational piece about your students' mock election projects, voter registration, or a candidate proposed city ordinance?
- ★ a student panel responding to viewer calls and questions, or a student moderator handling viewers' called-in questions after an interview with a guest or panel of guests?

Create and prioritize a list of all the other things you need to consider in this planning phase, including:

- ★ **personnel.** (Will you need a moderator, panelists, time keepers, hosts for special guests or the public if they are invited, student reporters and photographers, someone to distribute name tags?)
- ★ **program production crew.** (Will your students become trained crew members or will you have to find volunteers?)
- ★ **timing.** (How long should the program be? How much time should be devoted to each candidate/issue?)
- ★ **program scheduling.** (Do you want to schedule your program in a block of programming about the election or randomly during the day? When do you want your program to run: at night so that students can watch or listen to it with their parents or during the day so students can watch or listen to it during class?)
- ★ **time restrictions.** (If necessary, what issues will you include in or omit from the program?)
- ★ **caller questions.** (When will you accept them? throughout the show? only at the end? every five minutes?)
- ★ **interests you are representing.** (education, youth, business, rural or urban consumers?)
- ★ **nonpartisan presentation of the issues and/or candidates.** (Remember that the National Student/Parent Mock Election is a nonpartisan organization and all candidates must be given equal representation.)

Finally, you need to decide if you want to tape your program or host it live. Taped shows are far easier as you can rehearse the program, correct mistakes, and add or delete from the content as necessary. Taped programs also provide students with additional educational opportunities because they not only learn technical skills such as editing, but they also learn to compromise and cooperate as they develop a final program.

#### **D. DETERMINE YOUR PRODUCTION NEEDS.**

Once you have decided on a format, make another appointment with a program counselor/planner from your local access station—perhaps he or she could come to your class. In this meeting, you should decide exactly what you need to produce your program—equipment, crew, timeline, facilities, and so on.

## **E. ASSEMBLE A PRODUCTION CREW.**

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You will need to assemble a crew for your program that includes technical assistants such as camera operators, sound recorders, and lighting specialists. Many times the local cable or radio access station can provide you with a list of volunteers who might work on your crew. Or, perhaps your students will want to certify themselves for these positions by taking technical classes from the local access station.

## **F. RESEARCH CANDIDATES AND CAMPAIGNS ISSUES.**

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In addition to using the library, encourage students to request campaign materials, collect newspaper clippings and use the Internet. The Mock Election's Internet Home Page, located at [www.nationalmockelection.org](http://www.nationalmockelection.org), can help students research the candidates and election issues, using on-line resources.

You may wish to ask a campaign staffer to come speak to students about a candidate's campaign platform. Emphasize the importance of understanding the complete picture and incorporating all viewpoints into research and reporting, and help students understand how their own biases and perspectives may affect their viewpoint.

## **G. CONTACT PUBLIC OFFICIALS.**

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If you plan to involve public officials, be sure to invite them as soon as possible. (For more information about how to contact public officials, see Chapter 8: Organizing Speeches and Debates Before Students and Parents by Local Candidates or Stand-ins for Candidates.)

## **H. PRODUCE YOUR SHOW.**

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What approach or style do you want to utilize: documentary, informational, dramatic or innovative? What kinds of video direction will you need: camera moves, shot composition, special effects, title/credits, graphics? Will the audio component of your program consist of one or more of the following: narration, voice-over, music, natural sound, or sound effects? The only approach that is right is the one that works best for you.

However, we have discovered a few things that may be of help to you:

- ★ An informational format is usually most effective (unless you have extensive television production experience) because it is simple and straightforward.
- ★ Using more than one camera to record your program usually produces more difficulties than rewards because it's very difficult to coordinate two cameras, multiple cameras take up valuable space, and editing tape from two different cameras is extremely time consuming.
- ★ Save sound effects, narration, and voice-overs for the end. They are easy to lay into the tape and are often influenced by the visual content of the tape or the final outcome of the tape.
- ★ Begin the program with an establishing shot. The establishing shot is designed to familiarize viewers with the set, the audience and where the program is taking place. Also include a 30–60 second introduction at the beginning of the program that lists your objectives, topic, guests, and announce if audience members or members of the public will be participating.
- ★ It's best to develop a 30-minute program because most local access stations have a greater number of 30-minute time slots available than 60-minute time slots. Also consider that a) for every 10 minutes of taping, you will use about 1 minute in your final show, and b) the average attention span of a television viewer/radio listener is approximately 9 minutes.
- ★ Credits can be listed at the beginning or the end of the program.
- ★ The final tape (after editing, sound, and graphics are completed) should begin with the following items, in order: 30–60 seconds of color bars and tone (available from your local access station); a program slate that lists the name, and exact length of the program, the audio channel information, and the producer's name and phone number; a visual/audio countdown from 3–10; two seconds of blank black screen or silence; the program; and 60 seconds of a blank black screen or silence.



- ★ The advantage of television is that it can take viewers closer to the subject than they can often get on their own. For this reason, you should strive for a warm, intimate tone with close-up shots of candidates, students, the moderator, the audience, and set decorations such as the flag or maps.
- ★ If you include graphics in a television production (credits or titles of guests), they should remain on screen long enough for a viewer to read them twice. (Graphics also need to fit within a border that measures 10% of the screen on all sides. This is to accommodate differences in television screens.
- ★ Look directly into the camera as if you were looking directly into someone's eyes as you are having a conversation with them.

At this stage of the process, a script must be developed to guide the development and implementation of your program. Consider these points when developing your script:

- ★ What will your script look like: a two-column format, story board, shot list, outline, or all of the above? Developing a two-column script (see *Figure E*) is very efficient because the script incorporates direction for the moderators, guests, camera operators, sound operators, and set designers rather than having to create separate directions for each component of the production. Be sure to give a copy of the script to all participants including the production crew, students, directors, the local access station, and special guests.
- ★ When talking on camera or radio, always use singular pronouns. When viewers/listeners hear "you," they think "me"; when viewers/listeners hear "you all," viewers think "them."

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#### **I. SELECT A STUDIO AUDIENCE.**

If you want to include others in the studio audience besides students, whom will you invite? Candidates, mock election sponsors, schools from other districts/areas, parents, the public, local businesses and organizations, or party members? Who will send out invitations and thank-you letters to participants? students, sponsors, a cooperating organization?

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#### **J. CONSIDER THE BUDGET.**

Because local access television and radio are community services, most (if not all) facility and equipment usage will be free. However, some other items may require minimal funding, such as sound effects and background music, videotapes, costumes and props. Sometimes local access stations offer competitive grants for these items so be sure to check with a station program/counselor at the local access TV or radio station.

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#### **K. DEVELOP A VIEWER/ LISTENER GUIDE.**

Consider developing a viewing/listening guide for students with pre- and post-show objectives to stimulate student thinking. The guide might include pre- and post-program discussion questions as well as background information on the candidates and issues. Pre-program questions might be tied to vocabulary development. The questions would stimulate students to think about the issues in the program and help them understand words and/or issues that may be unfamiliar to them. This would strengthen the foundation on which to build new learning.

Post-show questions should be designed to help students develop higher level critical thinking skills and to increase their interest in the voting process. All questions should be related to the topics of the program.

## SAMPLE CABLECAST SCRIPT FROM DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

VIDEO	AUDIO
National Student/Parent Mock Election (still shot)	Music
Student Anchor #1	"Hello. Welcome to the National Student/Parent Mock Election."
Student Anchor #1 Student Anchor #2 Student Anchor #3	"I'm (insert name of Anchor #1) of _____ High School and my co-anchors are (names of Anchor #2) of _____ High School and (name of Anchor #3) of _____ High School."
Student Anchor #1	Give a brief overview of the National Student/Parent Mock Election project. Also mention that Anchor #2 will be keeping them abreast of the election returns from participating schools.
Student Anchor #2 Telephone number (still shot)	"Thanks (name of Anchor #1), that is exactly what I will be doing, but before I begin, let's look again at the telephone number that we want students to use in calling in their schools' results. That number is (insert telephone number). Call in by _____ P.M."
Student Anchor #2	"We have students from our schools who are here recording and tabulating the votes as you call in. Let me introduce them to you."
Student #4	(Student's name) _____ High School
Student #5	(Student's name) _____ Middle School
Student #6	(Student's name) _____ Middle School
Student #7	(Student's name) _____ Elementary School
Student #8	(Student's name) _____ Middle School

**Figure E**

VIDEO	AUDIO
Student Anchor #2 Election returns on monitor, by schools (still shot)	"Students began calling in their election returns ____ minutes ago, so lets go directly to the election return board to see how the schools are voting."
Student Anchor #3	Looking at Anchor #1: "You know (name of Anchor #1) this mock election is (give information on the mock election and its value. Talk about its outcomes.)"
Highlights of the Mock Election Program	Anchor #3 reads mock election program highlights as they appear on TV.
Student Anchor #1	"Let's go to (name of Anchor #2) for an update on the returns."
Student Anchor #2  Election returns on monitor	"Okay! More schools have called in."  Anchor #2 reads election returns as they appear on TV
Student Anchor #1	"For the past week or two, students in our schools have been involved in voter education. Students have learned that voting is a right as well as a responsibility.  As citizens of the United States, we have many rights.  (Name of Student #9) of _____ High School is going to tell us about the foundation of these rights that we have as citizens. (Name of Student #9)"
Student # 9 _____ High School (Prerecorded)	A prerecorded story on the Bill of Rights— (3–5 minutes)
Student Anchor #1 Student Anchor #3	Very brief interaction between Anchor #1 and #3 on what Student #9 said.
Student Anchor #1	Looking in the direction of the election return board: "It's time for another update on election returns from the schools."



VIDEO	AUDIO
Student Anchor #2	"Let's look at the update."
Election returns on the monitor (still shots)	Anchor #2 reads returns as they appear on TV.
Student Anchor #2	(Gives the number of minutes left for students to call in their voting results.)
Student Anchor #3	"Going to the polls to vote in this mock election program is not the first time students of _____ have exercised their right to vote in this way. Students of _____ voted in the 1998 National Student/Parent mock election. (Name of Student #10) of _____ High School looks at the Mock Election program from a historical perspective. (Name of Student #10.)"
Student #10 _____ High School (Prerecorded)	A prerecorded story on the National Student/Parent Mock Election History. (3 minutes)
Student Anchor #1	"Remember to vote on November 7, this coming Tuesday." (This is an announcement for parents and others who can vote in the real election.)
Student Anchor #3	"In addition to voting, we have other responsibilities as citizens."
Student Anchor #1	<p>"That's true. It is our responsibility to know the law and to uphold it, and to help make our schools and communities safe.</p> <p>"And many students in our schools are getting proactive in doing just that—learning about the law and the function of the court, and speaking out against crime.</p> <p>Let's go to _____ High School and meet the 2000 Mock Trial Team and _____ High School where (name of Student #11) will tell us about a project at _____ High School called Teens Against Crime." (The intent here is to correlate other citizenship-related programs with the mock election.)"</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
_____ High School 2000 Mock Trial Team Prerecorded	Team talks about the Mock Trial Competition and its value for students. (prerecorded)—3–4 minutes.
Student Anchor #1	"Let's go to (name of Anchor #2) for an analysis of the votes. (Name of Anchor #2)."
Student Anchor #2	Gives total number of votes from all schools.
Voting results on monitor. (still shots)	Anchor #2 reads results as they appear on TV.
Student Anchor #3 and #1	Brief interaction about election results.
Student Anchor #3	"Remember to vote on Tuesday. (This is an announcement for parents and others who can vote in the real election.) Let's go to _____ High School where (name of Student #12) will tell you where you can vote on _____. " (Again, this is information for parents, et al.)
Student #12 _____ High School (Prerecorded)	3 Minutes Contrast the opportunity of voting and the accessibility of the polls today with long ago. The point to make is that there is no excuse for not voting. Read polling places as they appear on the TV. (This is for parents and others who can vote in the real election.)
Student Anchors #2, #1 and #3	Interaction among the three anchors about the value of the mock election experience.
Student Anchor #1	"Remember, voting is a right as well as a responsibility. Thank you for joining us in this cable show on the National Student/Parent Mock Election."
ALL students on stage:	MUSIC
CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	MUSIC
Stand up, shake hands, laugh, talk.	MUSIC
SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL TEACHERS	MUSIC
Written by: _____	MUSIC
A Production of: _____	MUSIC

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**L. PUBLICIZE YOUR PROGRAM.**

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Public involvement in your program—whether attendance, call-in questions or participation— will enhance your program tremendously. To help get the word out about your program, consider involving print and electronic media (See Chapter 4), announcing the program on other local access programs or community bulletin boards, and having students design and distribute flyers and the viewers guide.

Your viewership will also increase proportionally to the number of people you involve in your show. Be sure to invite people to the taping or rehearsing of your show such as representatives from cooperating organizations, local sponsors or contributors, local elected officials, other teachers and/or students, and the school administration. You may want to consider serving refreshments at the taping/ rehearsal, as well as having several spokespeople who can discuss mock election goals and activities with guests.

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**M. INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY.**

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Local businesses may be able to provide recording tapes for your program, decorations for a television set, preprinted invitations to the event, refreshments for a reception, name tags for special guests, or— most importantly—advertising.

If you have the budget, student-created advertisements can help get the word out and encourage community participation. If funds are limited, consider public service announcements available from local TV and radio stations, flyers, announcements at meetings of local organizations, community newspapers, and press releases.

Student involvement in this process can help you reach more community members and will help students prioritize and manage their time and efforts (particularly if, as a home work assignment, they are asked to approach two local businesses).

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**N. ATTEND TO DETAIL.**

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Prior to the event, make sure all your bases are covered. Ask students to make lists of all the program details and who will be responsible for each: Where will the audience/panel sit, where will the phone bank be located, who will run the phone bank, who will answer the phones, who will keep time/enforce time limits, who will oversee the lighting and sound system, and who will decorate the stage?

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**O. FOLLOW UP.**

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After the event, consider asking students to write thank-you letters to all participants. Also encourage them to remain up-to-date on the issues and candidates. Perhaps students can organize another show closer to election time or even after the elections are over.